

Vermont Area and State Agricultural Economic Development Strategies

The Concept: Develop detailed agricultural economic development strategies for multi-county areas. Together these strategies will constitute a larger Vermont Agricultural Economic Development Strategy.

Description of Process and Outcomes: Farming is inherently placed. It is driven by what the land will support, the knowledge and skill of those who farm, the income needs and financial assets of those who farm, the markets into which commodities, value-added products and services are sold, and the market infrastructure and access available to the farmers. This effort would identify a number of factors which together characterize the agricultural economy of a defined area where farm and market characteristics are more similar than dissimilar. These factors might include:

- Environmental assets
- Infrastructure
- Human capital
- Market access
- Farm ownership and tenure
- Professional and technical business support
- Financial capital
- Economic development policies and programs
- Stakeholder and community support
- Land use issues
- Distribution networks
- Agricultural labor availability

The analysis of these factors would result in:

- Agricultural economic development recommendations
- Agricultural business development recommendations
- Land use recommendations
- Pragmatic considerations
- Together these elements would inform an agricultural development strategy and plan.

Extensive local stakeholder engagement throughout the process is essential. Each area strategy and plan would be able to stand on its own, but taken together they would inform an overarching statewide strategy and plan that would respond to issues that are necessarily dependent upon actions and activities at the state level.

Economic Scope: Much work has been done in Vermont to promote local farm to local consumer initiatives to achieve a number of complementary goals (local markets, consumer access, healthier food choices, increased farm income, farm income security, sustainable farm systems, etc.). The proposed area agricultural economic development strategies would build upon this work, and would also take into account existing and potential agricultural production for markets beyond what might be considered local.

Precedents: Similar strategies have been developed for counties and regions throughout the nation. An example from Orange County, New York is provided.

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